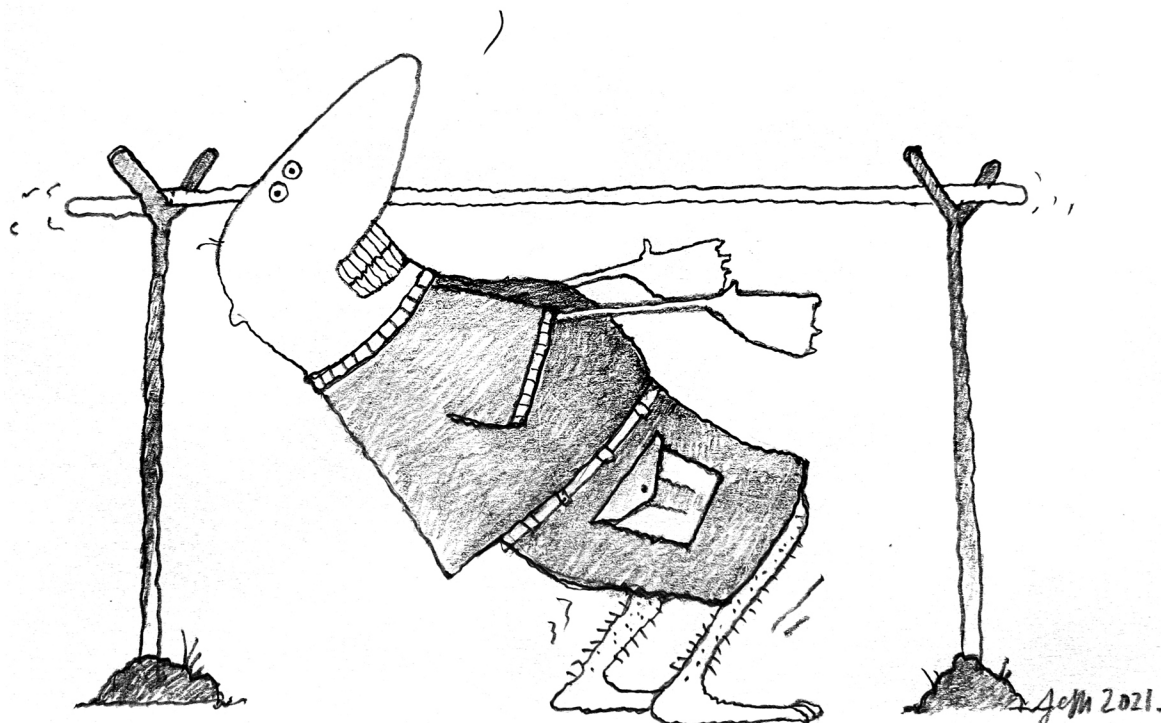


## STICKY WICKET

# Corona XXXVI – limbo

Mole

EVEN DARWIN ADMITTED THAT  
EVOLUTION HAS NOT BEEN KIND TO  
INSECTIVORES WHEN IT COMES  
TO LIMBO DANCING...



Original artwork by Pete Jeffs - [www.peterjeffsart.com](http://www.peterjeffsart.com)

Sitting here in limbo, waiting for the dice to roll. Sitting here in limbo, got some time to search my soul. Hey, there! No, I'm not soul searching (not sure I know how, we insectivores search for bugs). But listening to Jimmy Cliff's iconic song, from his movie, 'The Harder They Come,' which I first saw as a graduate student, oh so many years ago. Since then, 'Sitting Here in Limbo' has been covered by Jerry Garcia and David Grisman, Fiona Apple, John Sebastian, the Neville Brothers, and Willie Nelson, and I'm sure others. It's a great song. And yeh, I'm sitting in limbo. Vaccinated and waiting for life to happen, but all around, things are pretty bad. Cases are spiking (but, thankfully, deaths are down in my country, although still horrific). I hope you're okay.

Limbo is just sort of nowhere. It comes from the Latin 'limbus,' which is an edge or boundary, but its use in this case probably comes from Dante, who assigned to it the first circle of Hell. This was where all the really good pagans ended up, together with the unbaptized babies (who, I guess, had to be taken care of by the pagans?). It was there he met Euclid, Ptolemy, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, and his guide, Virgil, also introduced him to Hippocrates. Presumably, Einstein is there, too. Together with Richard Feynman,

Robert Oppenheimer, Rosalind Franklin, and Jonas Salk. As well as Rod Serling, Marilyn Monroe, Douglas Fairbanks, Lauren Bacall, all of the Three Stooges, and the Marx Brothers. I think I would prefer to be in Limbo, now that I think of it. Actually, if Dante is right, that's where I'm headed, so something to look forward to. Except for all the crying babies, I suppose.

Limbo is also a dance; I'm sure you've seen it (and maybe even tried it). It was a huge craze in the 1950s and 60s and it resurfaces at parties now and then. The idea is that two people hold a stick that you dance under, but by leaning back, not forward, so that you face upwards as you slide under the bar. And people ask, "How low can you go?" The dance originated on the island of Trinidad, which is where they also invented steel drums – have you heard these? Really fantastic. The steel drum was invented because the previous instrument of choice, the bamboo-tambo, which was a large bamboo pole that was banged on the ground, was outlawed, since people were using bamboo-tamboos to hit police on the head (I'm sure they deserved it). So, the people went into the junk yards, rounded up empty oil drums, and fashioned them into musical instruments that make a sublime sound. And these are the same

folks who invented the limbo, which they danced at wakes when someone died.

It was Julia Edwards, the ‘First Lady of Limbo,’ who introduced it around the world, appearing in lots of films and making people dance leaning backwards under sticks. Probably the most popular of these films was ‘Fire Down Below,’ which starred Rita Hayworth, Robert Mitchum, and Jack Lemmon and takes place in Trinidad. In the film, Jack Lemmon is a pretty bad guy, which is an unusual role for him. And Robert Mitchum is a pretty good guy, which is an unusual role for him. It is not a movie that you have to see, but Rita Hayworth is always great. (If you haven’t seen ‘The Harder They Come,’ that is a must-see. Go watch that instead). Fire Down Below all works out okay in the end, and Jack Lemmon walks away saying, “Sometimes you win, and sometimes you lose.”

And that, you see, is what is happening here in limbo. Sometimes we’re winning, and sometimes we’re losing. The vaccines are working, which is a huge *win*. And there are lots of people who don’t want them, which is a big *lose*. Large numbers of younger people are getting sick and filling the ICUs (lose), but we are also starting to get back to some semblance of life (wearing masks, please, so a win). We just don’t know enough yet. Even if you are vaccinated, you can still be infected (although this is reduced, so a win/lose) and even symptomatic (lose), although we seem to be protected from serious disease (win).

I’m worried that everyone is talking about herd immunity, which is leading to a lot of carelessness, which is undoubtedly responsible for the huge surge we are seeing in infections. There

are a couple of things to understand about herd immunity. First, what it is. If a virus has a transmission rate of 2 (actual transmission in the population, as this one often does), then if any infected person transmits to two immune people who do not get infected, the virus spread stops there. But think about it. In order to ensure that any infected person is unlikely to contact unvaccinated people, we need a *lot* of vaccinated people (do the math: if 80% of people are vaccinated, there is just over a one-third chance that if you meet two, at least one will not be vaccinated). But we also know that vaccinated people can be infected (at least have detectable virus) although we don’t know to what extent they can transmit it (we don’t have clear examples, but if someone is shedding virus, they can transmit). Secondly, herd immunity works in theory, but in practice, when a number of non-immune individuals get together, the disease spreads (which is why we still have outbreaks of measles and pertussis). We hear a lot of news stating the percentage of the population that has to be vaccinated to achieve herd immunity, but these are just educated guesses – we will not know until we have it. And there are analyses that suggest that with this virus, herd immunity is not going to happen. I hope they’re wrong, but I understand the reasoning.

If we can get the transmission rate well below one, we’re on track to beating this thing. We win. If we can only get it to slightly above one, we lose. How low can we go?

Jimmy Cliff sang, “Well, they’re putting up resistance, but I know that my faith will lead me on.” I want to have faith. I think we’ll win. But meanwhile, I’m sitting here in limbo.